DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 399 HE 012 397

AUTHOR Parker, Franklin
TITLE General Education or Vocational Education in College Programs: The Long View.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Curriculum; Core Curriculum; *Educational History; Educational Theories; Federal Legislation; *General Education; *Higher Education; Industrialization; *Liberal Arts; United States History; *Vocational Education; World History

ABSTRACT

The origins of general education are traced to the seven liberal arts in ancient Greece, showing the influence of Socrates, Plato, the Sophists, and others. Examined are the early conflict over the sources of knowledge and the uses to which it should be put. Relevance to the college curriculum is shown, and it is told how this was broadened to include technology and science with increasing democratization, industrialization, and technological advances after President Jackson's election in 1828. The influences are shown of the Morrill Act on land grant colleges and graduate schools, and other ideas from European higher education brought by influential scholars among the 9,000 Americans who studied abroad in the nineteenth century. Examined are general education innovations in the 1930's and the influential 1945 Harvard report, "General Education in a Free Society." Finally, the 1976 Harvard core curriculum plan is outlined and it is concluded that general education needs to have an essential place in undergraduate study. (Author/MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED184399

Franklin Parker
Benedum Professor of Education
602 Allen Hall, Evansdale Campus
West Virginia University
Morgantown, West Virginia 26506

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Franklin Parker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

General Education or Vocational Education in College Programs: The Long View

By Franklin Parker

Benedum Professor of Education

"What Knowledge is of Most Worth?," title of Herbert Spencer's 1859 essay, echoes today's search for curriculum balance in course-crowded, knowledge-exploding, vocationally oriented, materially minded U. S. education. Each age in this long quest has debated and selected school subjects to fits its visions, values, hopes, dreams, and conflicts.

Ancient Israel's search in the Old Testament was of man's yearning to emulate one God's perfection. Ancient Greece, in contrast, seeking to perfect the well rounded man, studied gymnastics and music. Songs and legends evolved into grammar and included poetry, drama, and literature. Sophists added instruction in rhetoric to help the free citizens speak well in public (home-educated slaves did the drudgery). Sophist Protagores added dialectics for skill in debating. Pythagoreans urged the four mathematical disciplines of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Socrates preferred dialectics, and Plato preferred mathematics to help achieve intuitive wisdom. Aristotle stressed logic for analysis of scientific evidence.

Thus in ancient times conflict arose over what knowledge was--intuitive insight already awaiting unfolding in a disciplined mind (Plato); or discovery of the material universe by collecting,

HE 012 397

comparing, experimenting (Aristotle). Another conflict was over what knowledge was to be used for--to serve society, the state, the future (traditionalist-conservative); or for self-advancement, satisfaction, profit now (Sophist-pragmatist).

Ancient Greece thus left as a heritage a disputatious but common curriculum which lasted, with modifications, for over 2,000 years: the seven liberal arts, consisting of the trivium: grammar, rhetoric, logic; and the quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy.

This speculative, contemplative course of study focused on developing the mind for rational thought, was concerned more with beauty, truth, goodness, than profit, wealth, or success. The view prevailed that liberal or general education was for the aristocrat, while vocational education was for the lower classes. True education was liberal and general, not vocational. . .

So it was in the nine American colonial colleges, and even among the hundreds of colleges established mainly by Protestant groups across the Alleghenies after the Revolution. A few modernists such as Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Ticknor of Harvard, President Horace Holley at Transylvania, and John B. Lindsley at Nashville raised voices for parallel but not substitute modern languages, more mathematics, English, and the sciences. Their efforts, which eventually would triumph, were temporarily defeated by the Yale Faculty Report of 1828 which upheld the classical, humanist curriculum.

Andrew Jackson's election in 1828 symbolized the increasingly democratic, industrial, and technological tide sweeping America. French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville in 1831 noted Americans'

pragmatic and egalitarian spirit. Parents', employers', and students' demand for practical training proved irresistible.

West Point's engineering emphasis from 1802 and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's founding in 1824 as the first U. S. school of engineering indicated this tide. The Ivy League succumbed with Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School and Yale's Sheffield Scientific School, both 1847; Dartmouth's Chandler School, 1851; and Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute and Cooper Union soon after. The new railroads, canals, highways, factories, and farm machinery such as McCormick's reaper required technicians and technically trained managers.

The Morrill Act of 1862, establishing land-grant colleges for science, agriculture, and the mechanic arts, marked an historic change from a general-liberal to a utilitarian-vocational curriculum in American higher education.

The over 9,000 Americans who studied in German universities in the nineteenth century brought back the graduate school and other European educational ideas. The influence of such German-trained American university presidents as Charles W. Eliot of Harvard, Daniel Coit Gilman at Johns Hopkins University (first U. S. graduate school, 1876), Andrew Dickson White at Cornell University, James B. Angell at the University of Michigan, G. Stanley Hall at Clark University, W. W. Folwell at the University of Minnesota, and William Rainey Harper at the University of Chicago was to lessen colleges' in loco parentis status, make graduate school research prestigious, and encourage undergraduate specialization. College academic courses now offered majors in depth so that undergraduates emerged as

specialists, ready for work or for further study in a graduate or professional school.

But there were demurrers against the vocational tide sweeping higher education. Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1837 "American Scholar" speech declared that a man must first of all be a Man before he could be a good farmer or tradesman or engineer. John Stuart Mill echoed this spirit in his University of St. Andrews, Scotland, address on February 1, 1867: "Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers."

Other similar sentiments were expressed and experimental moves were made in the early twentieth century toward some kind of balance in undergraduate education. Particularly fruitful experiments in the 1930s included Alexander Meiklejohn's experimental college at the University of Wisconsin, the General College of the University of Minnesota, Missouri's Stephens College, St. John's College in Annapolis, and many others. But the high point of reform, the Harvard Report, GENERAL EDUCATION IN A FREE SOCIETY (Harvard University Press, 1945), is worthy of special note in a look back and since at the long search for a liberal, general, and common education in an increasingly technological, materialistic, pragmatic, and job-oriented American society and school system.

It was an influential wartime report by a committee of twelve appointed by President James Bryant Conant to look into "The Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society." A friend, President W. H. Cowley of Colgate College, told Conant that if he was really interested in salvaging the liberal arts tradition, he would do as much for the committee as he would do for a science research

project. Stung by this challenge, Conant, former Harvard chemistry professor, obtained $60,000 for the committee, thus assuring wide publicity and acceptance.

Earlier, Harvard President Charles W. Eliot, also a former chemistry professor, had in 1869 helped turn the tide against prescribed liberal arts curriculum by emphasizing free electives. It was later jokingly reported that a Harvard freshman said he would and did graduate by taking only freshman-level elective courses.

Electives, first used at the University of Virginia, 1825, were inevitable as the curriculum expanded and enrollments grew. The widely copied emphasis on electives made some educational leaders fear that the traditional liberal arts were being watered down and lost. Some felt we were educating more students but less well, emphasizing practical and immediate needs but neglecting things of the mind and spirit needed for vision and wisdom. The liberally educated, culturally balanced, and morally directed national leadership seemed in danger of being swamped by a culturally shallow, self-serving, newly emerging class. Or so it was thought.

In the ongoing search for curriculum balance, Harvard's President A. L. Lowell in 1910 substituted for free electives the idea of concentration and distribution. In France in World War I, Columbia English Professor John Erskine enthralled ordinary soldiers fresh from battle with great ideas from great books that dealt with big questions of life, freedom, God, and destiny.

Helping Erskine in his post-World War I Columbia undergraduate honors course in the great books was young philosopher Mortimer Adler, soon pulled away by the University of Chicago's young, new, iconoclastic President Robert M. Hutchins. Together they started Chicago's

undergraduate great books seminars; turned St. John's College, Annapolis, into a four-year great books college, 1937; and in 1952 published the GREAT BOOKS OF THE WESTERN WORLD. Hutchins and Adler of Chicago, Meiklejohn at the University of Wisconsin, and others elsewhere sought to balance American higher education's practical needs with reminders of its western liberal heritage. But they failed as the country rushed into World War II demands and postwar expansion. Conant's committee, established in uncertain war year 1943, published its report in victory year 1945, just as the 1944 GI Bill of Rights veterans swarmed into higher education.

The widely publicized Harvard Report recommendations--that up to 75 percent of high school education be general and that colleges require at least six general courses in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and physical sciences--were adversely affected by the 1950s Cold War and Sputnik curriculum demands. Anti-Vietnam sentiment and various late 1960 protests forced into the college curriculum many politically tinged and often transitory courses. Many faculties simply lost control of both students' lives and curriculum direction. Above all, the 1960s saw the greatest growth of college enrollment in history.

This was the setting for the late 1970s renewed search for quality in the face of exploding numbers, knowledge, economic restraints, and international tensions. Harvard again set the pace in undergraduate curriculum reform when in 1976 Arts and Science Dean Henry Rosovsky launched a "Core Curriculum" plan for some required liberal arts courses. Other institutions followed this lead, including West Virginia University, urged by its late

President James G. Harlow, a University of Chicago doctoral graduate. Neither Harvard nor West Virginia University nor the other institutions have been fully satisfied. The quest for curriculum balance goes on.

In America the problem is heightened because the schools which helped to Americanize immigrants have been burdened more and more with socializing diverse classes of youths. Practical knowledge and job training, yes. Cultural heritage and wisdom from the past, maybe, if there is time. But above all, schools must be a solver of socio-economic problems and the great leveler of class and other divisions. The public generally and many school people turn away from selectivity, competition, and failing anyone. Life can do this, but not the schools. In theory at least, they must always elevate, and that means the children of the poor and disadvantaged.

These then are the questions which plague us: Whether liberal arts depth can also broaden narrow modern specialization. Whether liberal education can counter less desirable aspects of mass culture. Whether the liberal arts represent the best possible preparation of the mind and spirit without neglecting the education of the hand. Whether all can be educated to be both equal and excellent. Whether a democracy can ever hope to become a universal aristocracy (are they irreconcilable?).

Perhaps Thomas Jefferson spoke to these dilemmas and challenges when he reportedly wrote: "A people that expect to be ignorant and free expect what never was and never will be."